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## Innovation in the GHI: How science and research can make foreign aid more effective

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A Guest Post by Kaitlin Christenson, Manager, **Global Health Technologies Coalition**



**Global Health Technologies Coalition**

“There is too little innovation focused on designing technologies and strategies that can work in resource-poor places and help the people who are hardest to reach,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said during a recent speech on the Global Health Initiative (GHI). She added that the GHI is “investing in innovation,

with a focus on developing tools that will help diagnose, prevent, and cure disease in the communities where we work, which are often remote and poor in resources.”

The role of innovation is well-recognized by the architects of the GHI—promoting research and innovation has been named as one of the initiative’s key principles. In fact, innovation and research have the potential to maximize US investments in foreign assistance and international development more broadly. The GHI provides compelling models as US policymakers consider how to make foreign assistance more effective at reducing poverty and spurring economic growth, particularly of how to leverage a key competency of the US government—driving innovation to benefit those in need.

### **Coordination and Integration**

International development efforts will be most successful if they are streamlined, and US agencies working in international development should be strategically coordinated to maximize impact. A current initiative under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief—part of the GHI—provides a model for effective cross-agency collaboration to achieve multiple goals. The **Medical Education Partnership Initiative** joins

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support from the National Institutes of Health, the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, the Department of Defense, and the US Agency for International Development to increase the number of new health care workers, strengthen medical education systems in the countries in which they exist, and build clinical and research capacity in Africa.

### **Long-Term, Strategic Investments in Partner Countries**

A principle shared by those leading both the GHI and foreign assistance reform efforts is fostering greater country ownership. In particular, the US government aims to implement tailored strategies that countries take the lead in designing and support countries in building their capacity to manage development programs over the long term. Science and research are key components of any effort to build country-level leadership and capacity. For example, health research focusing on diseases of the developing world necessarily involves investments in clinical and laboratory infrastructure and human resources in partner countries, as well as collaboration with governments to build a supportive policy and regulatory environment for innovation and access. Strengthening science and research capacities is also crucial to economic growth, and can help develop capacities that are transferable to other sectors, such as climate change technology, food security and hunger, and safe water.

Research, science, and innovation have the potential to transform societies and save lives worldwide well into the future. Investment in these efforts can help develop more sustainable approaches to health and development by placing the power to innovate in the hands of local leadership. Through presidential and congressional efforts to reform foreign assistance, it is crucial that research and innovation be integrated into strategic plans to achieve global health and development goals.

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